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YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

VOLUME XXXIV • NUMBER 12

DECEMBER 1955



Yosemite Chapel, Winter

—Fiske, C. 1885

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This telephone set made its debut to subscribers in 1882, the same year that a nine-mile telephone line was strung over the High Sierra at an altitude of more than 12,000 feet. (Courtesy Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company)

Yosemite Nature Notes

THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF
THE YOSEMITE NATURALIST DIVISION AND
THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION, INC.

John C. Preston, Superintendent
D. H. Hubbard, Assoc. Park Naturalist

D. E. McHenry, Park Naturalist
W. W. Bryant, Asst. Park Naturalist

W. C. Bullard, Junior Park Naturalist

VOL. XXXIV

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FOR \$25 —

THE WORLD'S HIGHEST TELEPHONE LINE

By Fran Hubbard

A telephone line was essential to the driving of the Great Sierra tunnel, to cut the fabulous Sheepherder Lode, near the crest of the range, in the Tioga Mining District. The *Homer Mining Index*, Lundy's newspaper, on March 11, 1882 carried the following account: "The Lundy and Tioga telephone line, recently constructed and owned by the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company of Tioga, is the highest telephone line in the world. The line is about nine miles in length, ascends 4,245 feet from Lundy, crosses Mount Warren Divide at an elevation of 12,250 feet above sea level, descends 3,750 feet to the Lee Vining Creek, and again ascends 800 feet to Bennett City, which is 9,300 feet above sea level. It works to a charm, every word over the line being clear and distinct, even when the most furious storms are beating against the wire along the lofty divide over which it runs."

Bennett City (later called Bennettville) is now a ghost town. About one mile northeast of Yosemite's Tioga Pass, it was headquarters for the ambitious mining corporation whose



Some of the insulators still cling to the tops of the long-abandoned poles.



"... Every word . . . clear and distinct, even when the most furious storms are beating against the wire along the lofty divide over which it runs . . ." Mount Dana in the background.

home office was in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Messages of both sorrow and joy must have been transmitted over the wire, and on July 3, 1884 it relayed the fateful order to shut down the mine, ending forever the operation of the company.

A careful search of the west slope of Mount Warren Divide, above Saddlebag Lake, will be rewarded by traces of the old line. Insulators and iron wire may be found, and a few snow-broken poles remain above timberline. At the crest of the divide, pairs of unused poles lie side by side, as they were dropped from panting pack animals more than 70

years ago. The east side of the saddle ends in a sheer cliff, and a cautious glimpse over the side and down Lake Canyon reveals many of the old poles still in place in the rocky abutments, though the wire has long since fallen to the fury of the Sierran winters.

Little was recorded of the effort in time and money which went into the construction of "the highest telephone line in the world." Its final chapter was written in terse words by the sheriff of Mono County who, on February 7, 1888, auctioned "One telephone line between Lundy and Bennettville, complete with poles and wire . . . For the sum of Twenty-five Dollars."



Pairs of unused poles lie at the summit of Mount Warren Divide, unmoved since they were dropped from pack animals in 1882. Mount Conness and its glacier in the background.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We are again indebted to *Pacific Discovery*, bi-monthly publication of the California Academy of Sciences, for permission to reprint this article, which appeared in their issue for May-June 1955, and for the generous loan of their engravings.

NATURALIST JOINS YOSEMITE STAFF

By Donald Edward McHenry, Chief Park Naturalist

The newest member of the Yosemite naturalist staff is Bill Bullard, recently of Tumacacori National Monument. Bill became Junior Park Naturalist in Yosemite National Park in April of this year. So pleased is he with his new assignment that he was heard to remark that his position description sounded like a write-up of his favorite hobbies.

Bill was born in Omaha, and graduated from high school in McCook, Nebraska. During the school year of 1941 he studied at Colorado A.&M. In World War II while assigned to the Army Medical Corps he saw service in North Africa and Italy. After discharge he majored in botany and geography at the University of Denver, receiving his AB degree in 1949.

Before graduating he entered Mexico City College with his wife, Jean, where they studied the archeology, geography, and folklore of Mexico. Later when stationed at Tumacacori National Monument, 20 miles north of the Mexican border, the Bullards made many numerous trips into Mexico, especially the state of Sonora. There they visited and studied many of the old Spanish missions. At present Bill is preparing a paper on little-known missions of the Sonora River Valley.

After graduation he was a seasonal ranger-naturalist at Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado, followed by a winter as ranger at Tumacacori National Monument in Arizona. Before returning to Mesa Verde as ranger-archeologist the



Bill Bullard

summer of 1950 he filled in as ranger at Aztec Ruins National Monument, New Mexico.

At the close of the 1950 season at Mesa Verde Bill accepted a seven month appointment with the U. S. Geological Survey while awaiting his permanent appointment with the National Park Service. At the U.S. G. S. he was a cartographer in the Topographic Map Section.

In June 1951 he was assigned to Wupatki National Monument in Arizona as a ranger. This area also administers Sunset Crater National Monument. One of the colorful Navaho Indian families living at Wupatki became good friends of the Bullards and taught them many Navaho ways of life. In January 1953 he was transferred to Tumacacori as ranger. While there he assisted in the administration of Colorado National Monument until

his transfer to Yosemite in April 1955 as Junior Park Naturalist.

Mr. Bullard brings to the work in Yosemite a rich background of experience in national park work. In each area in which he had duty, he participated in interpretative programs in which he manifested real capability. At Wupatki he made several new museum exhibits and revised the Sunset Crater and Wupatki trail guides. At Tumacacori the re-landscaping of the Spanish mission-style garden and revised the garden guide. The month prior to coming to Yosemite he was on special assignment at the Southwestern National Monuments head-

quarters designing and preparing wayside exhibits for the mission self-guiding trail at Tumacacori.

He shares with his wife such hobbies as camping, skiing and hiking. In fact they met while climbing the Crestone Needle, one of Colorado's 14,000 foot peaks. Bill has had an active hobby of photography for 18 years. Their three children, all of whom were born in National Park Service areas, are Wendy, 5, born at Mesa Verde; Billy, 4, at Wupatki; and Janet, 5 months, in Yosemite.

A sincere welcome has been extended to the Bullards by the Yosemite community.



ANIMAL ANTICS AT ARCH ROCK

By Robert W. Carpenter, Park Ranger

THE NOISEMAKER

Blue-fronted Jay, Black-crested Jay, the Stellar's Jay are some of the names given to a very common bird found in almost every part of Yosemite National Park. Other names, not as complimentary, are also given to this raucous but friendly denizen of campgrounds and forest.

To the delight of most picknickers the jay will appear almost as soon as a food container is opened. Its saucy call anticipating a hand-out will soon attract the visitors and any other jays that are in the area. Due to its boldness or curiosity, or both, the jay will allow an observer to approach to within a few feet before awkwardly hopping or flying away.

It is interesting to watch the antics of the jay. Its curiosity is probably brought on by a constant

search for food. If it doesn't immediately eat the food that it finds, the jay will hide the tidbit in some crevice in the side of a building, or bark of a tree or in loose soil where the prize may be covered. Several times during the course of a day the jays will swoop down into the road next to the entrance station to pick up insects that have dropped from the radiators of incoming cars.

Invariably, food is taken to a relatively safe perch where it is held firmly by the jay's toes. In this position unpalatable insect wings are easily removed and edible portions are broken into bite-sized pieces. Being good parents, mature birds may often be observed calling to and gently offering tidbits to young birds that are as large as themselves.

The jay's landing on the ground is similar to the landing of a light plane by an inexperienced pilot.

Several stiff-legged bounces usually seem to be required before the bird comes to a solid upright stop. When landing on the branch of a tree the jay seem to misjudge its airspeed and nearly falls forward after grasping the branch.

The last sound heard before darkness and the first sounds at day-break seem to be the raucous calls of the jays. However, they do have variety in their calls, some of which are rather pleasing to the human ear. At times they will utter an almost inaudible series of mocking-bird-like tones which have a slightly ventriloquistic quality. Several times I have looked right past an innocent-looking jay in trying to determine the source of a sweet melody. Then, by focusing attention on the jay, it could be seen that the melody was coming from this clown with the light blue, vertical "eyebrows."

NIGHT PROWLER

Hearing a noise in the kitchen of the dormitory two park rangers rushed to see what was causing the disturbance. All they saw was a flash of gray going through the screen door. A half-loaf of raisin bread was scattered on the table,

the chair and the floor.

While the rangers were discussing the identity of the prowler, the screen door stealthily reopened. In came a strange animal with large eyes and ears, a body about the size of a large gray squirrel and a tail at least as large as the whole body and head together. The black rings on the gray tail identified the creature as a ring-tailed cat.

Appearing unafraid, or perhaps spurred on by its taste for raisin bread, the "cat" jumped onto the chair within four feet of the rangers. Taking a slice of bread in its mouth it again hurriedly disappeared through the screen door.

Several times during the summer the ringtail visited the kitchen during its nightly search for food. The screen door was left ajar so that it could enter and leave the kitchen at will. It was left ajar, that is, until one night a ranger entered the kitchen to find a freshly baked coffee cake scattered all over the floor. From that day on the door was very carefully latched. The "cat" was banned from the kitchen except on special occasions when a ranger was present to chaperone its activities.



THE ORIGIN OF THE NATIONAL PARK IDEA IN AMERICA

A Condensation by Douglas H. Hubbard
Associate Park Naturalist

Part III

"As one might have expected Horace Greeley paid his respects to Yosemite as soon as possible and made the most of it. For reasons unknown, Greeley was in a tremendous hurry and did more horseback riding in the valley than was good for him, especially since he was riding 'in torture' with Mexican stirrups that were too small. Being badly disposed, he was disgruntled at the lack of water in Yosemite Falls (it was August) and said so, which afterward caused a furious dispute. But he could not help being overwhelmed by the grandeur and sublimity of the wondrous chasm'; he considered Yosemite the 'greatest marvel of the continent, and hoped that the State of California would immediately provide for the safety of the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees.

"With so much interest devoted to Yosemite by travelers, journalists and writers from the East, it would be fascinating to know who in California was taking active interest in the destiny of the valley. We unfortunately know only very little about this. Certainly the Reverend Starr King's enthusiasm made him one of the leaders in the effort to conserve Yosemite . . .

"The men who were recommended as the first commissioners of the

Yosemite grant are mostly likely those who helped to prepare the act [which formed it]. They were Professor John F. Morse, Israel Ward Raymond, and Frederick Law Olmsted. Of Morse we know only that he was a well-thought-of physician in San Francisco. About Raymond we are better informed. It was he who addressed the decisive letter to Senator John Conness urging him to present a bill concerning Yosemite to Congress. He was known to have been a public-spirited citizen. Altogether it is quite safe to assume that as a whole the group of men promoting the interests of Yosemite did so for idealistic reasons. This is demonstrated in the measures they recommended and pushed.

"The coincidence of Olmsted's arrival in California at the very moment when he was most needed has curiously never been noticed. For once it seems that the right man was in the right spot at the right time. Living in Mariposa Olmsted was in close touch with Yosemite, and, we can be certain, thoroughly familiar with its problems. Certainly no one was better prepared to take an active part in urging the Yosemite grant and to keep the ball rolling. Preliminary discussions must have

taken place, probably with Olmsted and the other potential commissioners, before Raymond addressed a letter to Senator Conness [which stated in part]: . . .

'It will be many years before it is worth while for the government to survey these mountains. But I think it important to obtain the proprietorship soon, to prevent occupation and especially to preserve the trees in the valley from destruction and that it may be accepted by the legislation at its present session and laws passed to give the Commissioners power to take control and begin to consider and lay out their plans for the gradual improvement of the properties.

'May not this be a sufficient description:

"That cleft or Gorge in the granite peak of the Sierra Nevada Mountains situated on the head waters of the Merced River and known as the Yo Semite Valley . . .

"Also all those quarter sections in Mariposa County on which stands the grove of Gigantic trees known as the 'Mariposa Big Trees.' . . .

"The above are granted for public use, resort and recreation and are inalienable forever." . . .

"Conness was able to introduce the bill on March 28, 1864. There was some discussion on the floor of the Senate in which Congress stated that the bill had come to him from various gentlemen in California 'of fortune, taste and of refinement,' that the General Land Office also took great interest in the bill, and that there was 'no other condition of things like this one on earth.' Finally he referred to the sorry incident of the killing of the Calaveras tree in 1853. The bill was passed, and on June 29, 1864, it was signed by President Lincoln.

"So far nothing was extraordinary about the Yosemite grant, and national public opinion certainly was not aroused by the federal action; grants to states were given quite frequently. However, there was something peculiar about this grant, and as it happened, it was destined to set a precedent of real importance. The grant was given '*upon the express conditions that the premises shall be held for public use resort and recreation, shall be held inalienable for all time.*' These terms implied that no profit was to be expected from the new institution . . . What was really new about the grant was the fact that it served a strictly non-utilitarian purpose. It is necessary to stress this point in view of the claims that Yellowstone set this precedent . . .

"All through 1865 Olmsted was hard at work preparing a plan of management. In a letter to his father (July 5) he expressed his feelings that Yosemite was 'far the noblest park or pleasure ground in the world.' Just at this time he received the first group of dignitaries from the East who wished to visit the park. They were Schuyler Colfax, Speaker of the House, and a group of friends from the East and from San Francisco. Among them were Samuel Bowles, publisher of the Springfield Republican. In the travel account published later, Bowles made this remarkable statement:

"The wise cession and dedication [of Yosemite] by Congress and proposed improvement by California . . . furnished an admirable example for other objects of natural curiosity and popular interest all over the Union. New York should preserve for popular use both Niagara Falls and its neighborhood, and a generous section of the famous Adirondacks, and Maine, one of her lakes

and its surrounding woods.'

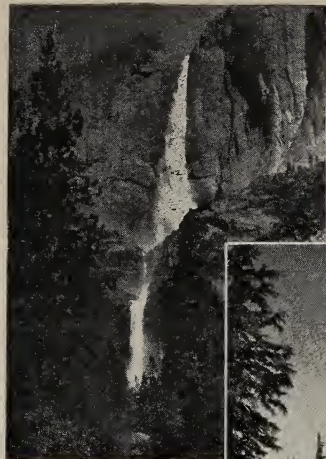
"Here we have in unmistakable language a formula not just for the protection of this or that area of some group or other, but for a systematic approach to an over-all system of protection of areas which illustrate specific features of nature throughout the nation. That is exactly the pattern which was followed many years later after the National Park Service had been established.

"Confirmed in his actions by Colfax and his party, Olmsted happily continued his efforts to organize the park. All his suggestions for improvements were summed up in a report approved by the Yosemite committee and submitted by him to the legislature. Unfortunately this 1865 report is lost and cannot be traced in the papers of the legislature in Sacramento . . .

(To be Concluded)



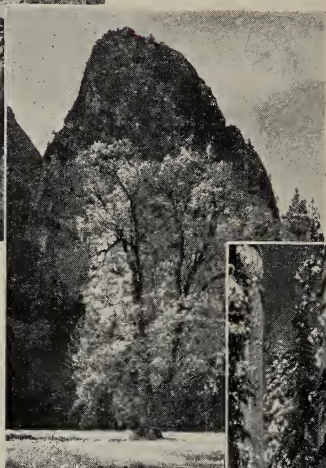
Members of the Colfax party which visited Yosemite in 1865 included, from the left, standing, Governor Bruf, Mr. Colfax; seated, Mr. Bowles, Mr. Richardson.



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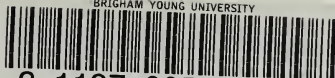
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